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CU officials covered up CIA funding for Eastern Europe incomes project

By JIM SCHACHTER

The Columbia chapter of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) revealed in October, 1967 that the Central Intelligence Agency, for the previous six years, had been secretly funding a Columbia study of the incomes of Eastern European countries.

Confirming the charge, the university administration stated that the "unclassified research project" was supported by the CIA's Office of Economic Research (OER). Andrew Cordier, then dean of the School of International Affairs, said the project was under the "light supervision" of the school.

Cordier, who in 1967 became Columbia's president, said the CIA assumed financing of the project in 1961, the study's sixth year of operation. Thad Alton, director of the study, made all financial arrangements with the CIA independent of university supervision.

Contrary to Cordier's statements, however, CIA documents recently obtained by Spectator make clear that:

- the study was initiated by the CIA in 1955 and financed by the Agency from its inception;
- Alton succeeded Schuyler Wallace, Cordier's predecessor as SIA dean, as the director of the project;
- under both Wallace and Alton, the project operated like any other research study at Columbia, with financial and contractual matters handled by the university's Office of Projects and Grants, and the Controller. In the project's later years, though, Alton corresponded with the agency from his Riverside Drive home, not using Columbia stationery.

University administrators, the documents show, engaged in a cover-up of the CIA's role in the project even after the Agency had declassified its support and given its approval to revealing its involvement. Someone at the university kept the CIA aware of the agita-

tion raised by faculty and students over the agency's relations with Columbia.

And the university saw to the quiet, gradual transfer of the project to the Riverside Research Institute (RRI), a private corporation created with the university's support, three years after the revelation of the study's CIA financing.

Between 1955 and 1970, when the project was moved to RRI, the CIA provided over \$1.1 million for the openly published research of Alton and his staff. The only elements of the study involving secrecy were the CIA's support—and Alton's position, according to the documents, as a CIA employee.

But Columbia officials appear to have been unprepared in the 1960s, as the swirl of campus turbulence

mounted, to come forward with information they possessed regarding the CIA's role in the study.

Professor of Mathematics Serge Lang (now a member of the Yale faculty) challenged the university in March, 1967 to make public its relations with the Agency. At a "smoker" attended by 300 faculty members, Ralph Halford, a special assistant to President Grayson Kirk, insisted that no such dealings existed.

When Columbia admitted the relationship later in the year, officials said they had not been granted permission to make the information public until the summer of 1967.

CIA documents, however, state that the Agency, with the clearance of its director Richard Helms, provided Columbia with the original draft statement early in 1967. The statement, as edited by Alton and approved by the Agency, was in Columbia officials' hands the day of Serge Lang's smoker.

A CIA memo attached to a copy of the statement reads:

The attached was provided initially for the express purpose of use by university officials in the event that it became necessary to acknowledge existence of CIA work at the "smoker" which was held on 23 March, 1967. As you know, the university was able to successfully parry questions raised at the "smoker" about government, and specifically CIA sponsored contracts.

Former administrators who might have played key roles in the "successful parrying" say they do not remember the events described in the memo. Warren Goodell, in 1967 the associate director of the Office of Projects and Grants, and the main contact between the CIA and Columbia, said recently he was not "involved in any discussion as to whether to release information or not."

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Halford would have made such a decision. Halford died several years ago. Kirk, now president emeritus, said Tuesday that he had not been involved in the discussions.

"If it came to my attention, I don't remember it, and I think if it had come to my attention I would have remembered it," Kirk said in a telephone interview.

Lang is described in the CIA documents as "the agitator at Columbia." Told recently that Columbia could have revealed the CIA's role in the project when he first asked about it in March, 1967, Lang termed the university's behavior "a breach of faith on the part of the administration."

Even after the CIA's funding of the study of post-war economies in the Soviet-bloc nations was made public, Columbia officials had misgivings about the Agency connection.

Goodell, for instance, asked that correspondence about the post-1967 unclassified contract with the Agency "not use CIA letterheads or envelopes." And on April 24, 1968, the second day of the takeover by students of university facilities, a Columbia official called the Agency to say the administration "wanted out" of its CIA contracts "at the earliest possible time."

After the campus had calmed down, however, the university seemed to lose its urgency about terminating the CIA contracts. Columbia asked that they be extended through early January, 1970—and the CIA agreed, though officials were bewildered by the request.

"We in OER," one memo states, "were a little surprised that the university would be willing to extend further the time under our contract, particularly in view of the furor raised at the time the Agency was invited out. Apparently things have quieted down at the university, and there is no burning desire to get out from under the CIA stigma immediately."

After the project was transferred to RRI, Columbia continued to rent it space in Prentiss Hall, to which it had moved after many years at 635 W. 115th Street.

Some questions about the project remain unanswered. It is unclear whether the post-doctoral researchers who worked under Thad Alton knew that their studies were funded by the CIA.

Schuyler Wallace conducted the project as if it were not affiliated with the government; therefore, persons working on the project there (were) not witting of the government sponsorship."

But many economists, both here and elsewhere, apparently suspected the CIA's involvement in the study. Professor of Economics Alexander Erlich said he had turned down an invitation to consult for the project because he knew it was CIA-supported.

"All economists in the Soviet field knew," he said.

None of the project's researchers, however, could be reached for comment. Alton refused to answer questions about his staff's awareness of the CIA support.

"Don't press me for details as to who was witting and who wasn't," he insisted in a phone interview.

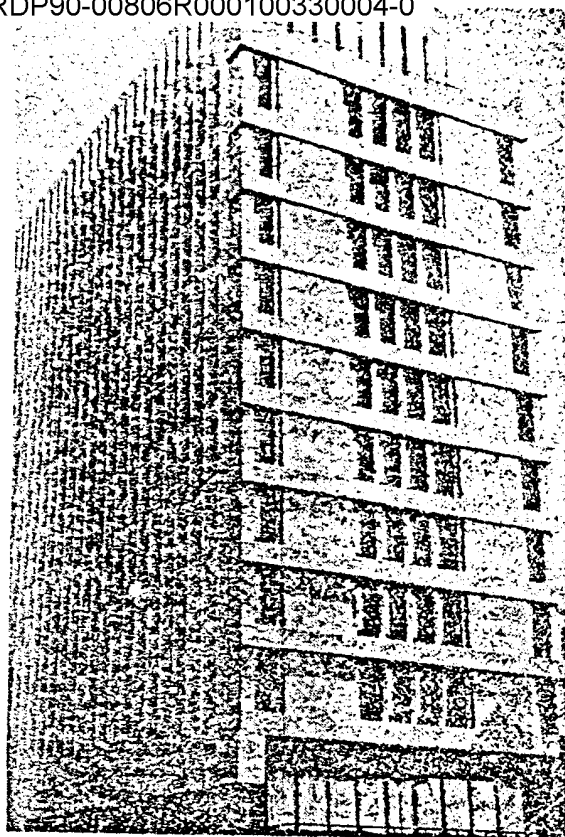
Alton himself raised another unresolved issue. He described the study as "a very honest, scholarly effort" and as "a job we did of which we were proud."

At question is why the CIA considered it necessary, for over 10 years, to conceal its sponsorship of the project.

A 1959 "project outline" states that the study was contracted with an external institution because of a scarcity of "personnel possessing analytical and language competence coupled with research experience on the (Soviet) Satellite economies who are both clearable and willing to work for CIA." The Agency, apparently, could not recruit the Eastern European emigres the project required.

Yet the CIA foresaw little risk in its interest in the project were somehow exposed.

The Agency's assessment, however, proved wrong as doubt about the government's role in higher education increased during the 1960s. Secrecy about the project, and the tension created by the denials and later exposure of CIA support, eventually created a situation in which Columbia officials felt obligated to lie about the project.



HUSHED MONEY: Andrew Cordier (left) former dean of the School of International Affairs (above), admitted in 1967 that the CIA had secretly assumed financing of an SIA study of Eastern European incomes in 1961. CIA documents show, however, that the agency had funded the project from its inception in 1955.

